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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1149
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3179
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2565
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE
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RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BISHKEK 001282

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/30/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [KG](#)

SUBJECT: NO KYRGYZ APPROVAL YET FOR MANAS AIRBASE PARKING
RAMP

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Classified By: CDA Lee Litzenberger, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. Following months of discussion between Manas Air Base and Manas International Airport, Airport authorities now support a proposed \$37 million infrastructure project to build three new parking aprons and a hot cargo pad for use by coalition aircraft at Manas Air Base. Though necessary, Airport support is not sufficient, and our focus now is on obtaining political approval from the Kyrgyz Government. The latter refused to take a decision on the project last summer due to pressure from Moscow, and the project remains as politically controversial as it is economically appealing. The Base is understandably anxious to break ground soon, but getting the Kyrgyz to yes on this proposal is not assured. For political reasons, the Kyrgyz will not support anything that is viewed as an expansion of the Base. As the Embassy works to sell the Kyrgyz bureaucracy on the project, it is essential that no ground be broken prior to obtaining written political approval. Should we do otherwise, the Kyrgyz would view it as a violation of sovereignty that would undermine support for the project and could threaten our continued access to Manas Air Base. End Summary.

Background: First proposal fails

12. (C) The U.S. first proposed construction of a parking ramp for coalition aircraft in November 2007. Initial Kyrgyz response was positive, but the proposal involved use of land leased by private individuals, and the required consolidation of this land entailed parliamentary approval. In May 2008, the press got wind of the project and portrayed it (incorrectly) as a request to double the size of the base and turn it into a permanent facility. The Security Council sent a letter to the Embassy saying that the project was "inexpedient." The Minister of Defense and his first Deputy were fired, in part over their support for the ramp project. Subsequently, the Embassy learned that Russian pressure had given the Kyrgyz cold feet on the project and, in the run up

to the October summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States, which Kyrgyzstan was hosting, Kyrgyz approval for the project would not be forthcoming. However, the Kyrgyz government had never met to discuss the project, and it remained an open issue.

The Base tries again

13. (C) In an effort to break the impasse, Manas Air Base redesigned the ramp project, which now consists of three ramps located on land currently leased from Manas Airport. Over the past few months, the Base has ironed out all related technical issues with the Airport, which now supports the project. Key to obtaining Airport support has been assuring the Airport that it would not lose revenue when the coalition begins using the new ramp in lieu of the spaces it now leases from the Airport. In a December 5 meeting, Airport President Sydykov informed the Base and the Embassy that it has referred the proposal to its Board of Governors, which will meet in January. The Board is likely to pass it on to the State Property Fund, which in turn will refer it back to the government in the form of the Cabinet of Ministers. Sydykov requested that ground not be broken on the project before political approval is obtained, a point he returned to repeatedly during the meeting. Although Sydykov supports the ramp project, it is not clear how hard he will personally press for the project. Sydykov is the son of former Presidential Advisor Usen Sydykov, who was recently relieved of his post.

And adds on a Hot Pad

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14. (C) In addition, the Base has proposed construction of a \$6-7 million hot cargo pad, for handling ammunition and other hazardous materials. The latter would be built on land leased from the Ministry of Defense, which supports the project, and the Ministry has begun the interagency process it will need to obtain approval. However, the new Minister of Defense is not prepared to take too high a profile on the project, given his predecessor's fate.

Contracting Timelines

15. (C) Manas Air Base has awarded the primary contract for the project, and is anxious to break ground early in 2009. If this is not possible, the funding for these projects will be re-directed to another country, and the Air Force needs time to effect this prior to the expiration of funds at the end of FY09.

Embassy Efforts to Accelerate Political Decision

16. (C) To accelerate the internal Kyrgyz process for reaching a political decision on the ramp project, the Charge met with Presidential Foreign Policy Advisor Ryskulov on December 16, with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Western Country Director Tursunkulov on December 21, and with the Prime Minister's Chief of International Affairs, Sapar Isakov, on December 24. The Charge explained the project and described the need for a political decision early in the new year. All expressed support for the project, which would constitute a significant economic investment in airport infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan. Ryskulov said it was essential that the airport proposal highlight the economic benefit of the project to Kyrgyzstan; Tursunkulov said MFA would support the project, if asked its opinion; and Isakov said he would raise the issue directly with the Prime Minister and begin laying the groundwork for reaching a political decision. He asked for some additional information on the project, and commended the recent Base orientation visit for 15 members of

Parliament, in which the members were briefed on the ramp project and expressed support for the project. "This was important," Isakov said, "because parliament believed the project was an expansion of the Base."

Next Steps

17. (C) The Embassy will continue to engage with senior Kyrgyz officials in an effort to spur a positive political decision early in the new year. Upcoming high level visits also offer opportunities for making our case. Much misinformation remains among government officials regarding the ramp proposal, which we will seek to address in our demarches. Concerns range from the earlier media disinformation that the base was seeking to double the amount of land it leases, to more complex issues such as why we say the ramps would cost \$30 million when the Kyrgyz say that they could do it for \$15 million, to lingering suspicions that the U.S. persistence in pushing for the project is due to some hidden agenda, to indifference over a project that the U.S. proposed but the Kyrgyz have never asked for.

Comment: Need to Respect Kyrgyz Sensitivities

18. (C) As we work the Kyrgyz interagency process, however, it is essential that the U.S. side refrains from breaking ground prior to obtaining the written governmental approval we need. The Kyrgyz decision process will not be driven by internal U.S. contracting timelines, and while the Embassy can help accelerate the Kyrgyz process, it would be

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inadvisable to try to circumvent it. Legally, the Air Base has contractual authority to modify land it has under lease; politically, though, the Kyrgyz are hypersensitive to perceived slights to their sovereignty. Given last summer's media controversy surrounding the ramp project, it is in our interest to cross all the political T's and dot all the political I's as we move forward. Breaking ground without political approval would not just risk killing the ramp project, it could also spark an emotional reaction from the Kyrgyz to close the base.

19. (C) As the process moves forward, we can expect renewed opposition from Moscow and, possibly, another round of disinformation in the media. Also, it is important that we prepare ourselves to accept either a "no" from the Kyrgyz or, more probably, an inability of the Kyrgyz government to take a decision in time to keep the project on schedule. Finally, we must keep in mind the continued corrosive effect of the unresolved 2006 shooting incident, and President Bakiyev's continued (incorrect) perception that the U.S. has failed to live up to its 2006 pledge to provide \$150 million annually in overall assistance. In both cases, what stings is the perception that the U.S. is not treating Kyrgyzstan with the respect due a sovereign nation. For that reason, we must take extra care to be respectful in our handling of the ramp project.

LITZENBERGER